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Robert Weise

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, weiser@csl.edu

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Marriage The Divine and Blessed Walk of Life¹

Robert W. Weise

For the lawful joining of a man and a woman is a divine ordinance and institution.² Dr. Martin Luther writes,

There is much to preach concerning this holy estate and divine ordinance of marriage, for it is the oldest of all estates in the whole world; indeed, all others are derived from that estate in which Adam and Eve, our first parents, were created and ordained and in which they and all their God-fearing children and descendants lived.

For there it is, written in the first book of Moses: “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it’” (Gn 1:27–28).

There it is; these are not my words nor those of any other man, but God’s word.³

Marriage is God’s divine and blessed walk of life for man and woman being true to each other, to be fruitful, to beget children, and to nurture and bring them up to the glory of God.⁴ Luther adds that marriage is necessary so that men and women can lead a chaste and decent life within the marriage covenant.⁵ In this world of countless wedding chapels, dating services, same-sex unions and marriages, as well as increased cohabitation of people of all ages in this nation, God’s word returns us to the biblical basics of the divine institution of marriage of a man and a woman as the one-flesh union of a husband and wife.

The concern of this paper is not primarily to do an extensive exegetical approach to the many scriptural passages that deal with marriage and family, especially as they apply to cohabitation and homosexual proclivities and “marriage.” Instead, I intend to contribute to the discussion on the dismantling/deconstruction of marriage in light of the Scriptures and Confessions. My claim is that the ongoing dismantling of biblical marriage and family bids all Lutheran Christians to return to their scriptural and their confessional roots, teaching the very young to the very old that marriage is God’s divine creative ordinance that places the man and the woman in a sexual and serving complementarity as husband and wife until death parts them, to the glory of God.

Robert W. Weise is a professor of practical theology and holds the Lutheran Foundation of St. Louis Chair of Pastoral Ministry and Life Sciences at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.



A review of the current statistical trends in divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex unions/marriages helps set the stage for a pastoral approach to revisiting the biblical and confessional view of marriage as the divine and blessed walk of life.

Divorce, Cohabitation, and Same-Sex Unions/Marriage

As our nation withdraws from marriage between a man and a woman to cohabitation and same-sex unions/marriage, the deconstruction or dismantling of the biblical one-flesh marriage becomes a more important matter for the church. The following brief summary of statistics relating to divorce, cohabitation, unwed birth rate, and same-sex unions/marriages tells a serious story regarding the decomposition of marriage and the challenges that confront pastors and the Christian community.

Divorce

The divorce rate in the United States has declined slightly. In 1979, there were 5.3 divorces per 1000 married persons. In 2007, the divorce rate was 3.6 per 1000 persons.⁶ The conclusion that the standard divorce rate is 50% is way off base. However, the divorce rate is 52% for couples married 20 years or longer. According to the Marriage and Religion Research Institute, the Index of Family Belonging for the United States is now just above 45%. This means that 45% of American children on the cusp of adulthood have grown up in an intact married family. The parents of the remaining 55% of 17-year-olds have at some time rejected their spouse.⁷

Pastors have always faced couples who are seeking a divorce for unfaithfulness, malicious desertion, or irreconcilable differences. Regardless, any permanent disruption of marriage that results in divorce is contrary to the word of God and his divine will. Jesus says, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery” (Mt 19:8–9, ESV).

Of course, this requires the pastor to be a very good listener to a couple who is struggling with their relationship. The goal is always reconciliation with repentance and forgiveness, for that is the beginning of healing in Christ Jesus. Unfortunately, for couples facing impending marital dissolution, the couple has usually made their decision before coming to the pastor. The pastor is left to pick up the pieces. Through listening, the pastor learns the context of the divorce or separation and can work to bring the couple back together. Parish pastors know that this is easier said than done.

Cohabitation

While divorce is on a slight decline, the rate of heterosexual cohabitation is increasing. Estimates from 2006–2010 show that nearly one-half (48%) of women ages 15–44 cohabitated before marriage. Similarly, most young couples live together before entering marriage. In addition, cohabitation has become a more frequent lifestyle

for childbearing. A recent report on fertility using the 2006–2010 National Survey of Family Growth showed that 23% of recent births among women ages 15–44 occurred within cohabitation, a significant increase from 14% in 2002. A summary of the statistics from 2010 (the latest available) shows that the number of people living together outside of marriage is about 7.5 million. This is up about 1500% from 1960.

One-half of births of cohabitating women in recent years were unintended.⁸ Based on a sample of 22,682 men and women, 55.5% women and 58.6% men agree that it is okay for an unmarried female to have a child. In addition, 65.4% of women and 54.7% of men agree that it is okay for gay men or lesbian adults to have the right to adopt children. Likewise, the survey from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) showed that more than 55% of men and women agree that it is acceptable for unmarried consenting adults as well as unmarried 18-year-olds to have sexual relations if they have strong affection for each other.⁹

These trends show cohabitation as an accepted part of the family formation in the United States and a step toward marriage. More disturbing is that it has become an alternative to marriage, family life, and procreation. Increasingly, cohabitation is becoming the first co-residential union formed among young and older adults, even though 40% of cohabitating twenty-something parents who had a baby between 2000–2005 split up by the time their child was five. That rate is three times higher than the rate for twenty-something parents who were married when they had a child.¹⁰

The National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia adds the following reasons for why people seek cohabitation: (1) childbearing prior to marriage; (2) live together and marry later in life (the average age of marriage is approaching 30); (3) allows young men and women to finish their education; (4) yields psychological independence; (5) the two-parent marriage [husband and wife] isn't necessary for having and raising children.¹¹

Glen Stanton picks up on the statistical trends in his recent book *The Ring Makes All The Difference, The Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage*¹² He brings a similar, yet different twist, to why the young cohabitate. He states that there are two reasons for younger persons cohabitating: “the low view and the high view” of marriage.

Regarding the “low view of marriage,” Stanton writes:

This view was responsible for launching of cohabitation as a growing domestic arrangement out of the 1960s' sexual revolution. It was motivated by the opinion that legal marriage was an unnecessary—or even stifling—formality that would only spoil the passionate “pure” love of a young couple. These cohabiters saw themselves as revolutionaries, explaining their actions with the decree that “love will keep us together” as the popular song, proclaimed. Other cohabiters boasted, “We don't need a piece of paper from city hall to make our love meaningful.”¹³

This historical justification for cohabitation is alive and well among all age groups, especially Generation X and Millennials.

The “high view of marriage” emphasizes the reality given in the statistics regarding parents who remained apart and the impact that this has had on their children. Stanton states that cohabitation within the Millennial generation is formed by fear of failure from seeing their parents go through a divorce or separation. They also see cohabitation as a training ground for marriage, which Stanton calls a “relational placeholder.”¹⁴ Approximately 62% of young adults (15–44) believe that “living together with someone before marriage is a good way to avoid an eventual divorce.”¹⁵ Young couples that I have counseled prior to marriage ignore or deny their cohabitations under the guise of parental approval or the politically correct phrase: “Everybody is doing it!” Some say that they know of LCMS pastors who have married some of their friends who are “living together.” The ends justify the means!

There is an increased stress on the young and old fueled by “radical individualism” and “self-fulfillment,” and a tension between the commitment of marriage within Christendom and society’s appeal to individual freedom. The postmodern idea of “anything goes” exacerbates this tension as society puts its stamp of approval on cohabitation.

As cohabitation is on the increase for younger adults, the same is true for older adults (over 50).¹⁶ In the latest report published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, Susan Brown, et al. state: “Direct measures indicate a rapid recent acceleration in the older cohabitating population, which grew from 1.2 million in 2000 to 2.75 million people in 2010 according to the U.S. Census Bureau.”^{17, 18} The main reasons for this increase in cohabitation are: (1) companionship; (2) alternative to marriage [not a prelude to marriage as in younger adults]; (3) permits partners to retain control over their assets or eligibility for certain types or benefits or income security; (4) low religious affinity (that is, they do not attend a Christian church on a regular basis).¹⁹

The baby boomers are the first generation in the older adult population to cohabitate in large numbers. The older adult population is projected to double by 2050, along with a decrease in marriages of older adults.²⁰ Brown concludes: “Cohabitation [of older adults] is gaining ground as a family form across the life course.”²¹ The older adult population continues to grow, and this rise of older adults becomes increasingly important for pastors, deaconesses, and especially chaplains associated with older adult residential facilities. Church workers and laity should be aware of the dynamics of cohabitating seniors, their Christian witness to their community, to their family, and to the institution of marriage. There is an ongoing need to recognize the aging population and understand what it means to be an older adult within the body of Christ, as well as a need to serve our older adult neighbors.

Cohabitation of all age groups as a foundation for future marriages builds on sinking sand rather than on the rock, Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. When cohabitating couples say that they love each other they fail to see that “love is the fulfillment of the law.” God’s law on marriage is that it is a divine institution for man and woman to be united in one flesh, blessed by God and if it is his will, for the procreation or adoption of children. Cohabitation is neither acceptable nor permitted by the word of God, regardless of the couple’s reason(s) for living together. As Luther writes: “For He [God] does not approve of dissolute licentiousness and promiscuous cohabitation.”²²

Same-sex “Marriage”

Same-sex marriages are on the increase in the United States. As of October 2013, 13 states and the District of Columbia have approved marriage for same-sex partners.²³ Seven more states have laws supporting civil unions or domestic partnerships. The Pew Research Center estimates 71,000 same-sex marriages in the United States.²⁴ However, the center suggests that this number is probably low because all states are behind in recording. As more states legalize same-sex marriage, this number will continue to rise.

Civil authorities and clergy who perform same-sex marriages may choose various forms of vows. Clergy in mainline Christian denominations that support same-sex marriages also have several choices of vows. These vows have variations, but always end in the name of the Trinity: “I pronounce that they are united, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”²⁵

For clergy and government officials who use a secular format for performing same-sex marriages, vows usually end in a variation of: “And may all of us be blessed by love as it shines through them all of their lives. It is now with great pleasure that I pronounce you spouses for life.”²⁶

Same-sex marriage, like cohabitation, is not age specific. Same-sex marriages occur within all age groups that have the legal freedom to be married. This challenges all pastors but especially chaplains in residential institutions who attend to the spiritual lives of elderly persons who are gay and cohabitating. Within this neo-gnostic approach to marriage, our society frees same-sex marriage from any moral responsibility and accountability to the Lord Jesus Christ and his created order.

The aforementioned statistical trends for same-sex marriage demonstrate the dismantling and deconstruction of the institution of marriage in the twenty-first century. Hence, a review of the biblical doctrine of marriage is necessary to maintain faithfulness to God’s word and to care pastorally for God’s people who seek marriage and God’s blessings. Christians must know that “marriage is not to be entered into lightly or inadvisably, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God.”²⁷

To that end, A. E. Giampietro’s paper *Marriage and the Public Good* is very helpful to the discussion of same-sex marriage. Giampietro clarifies the arguments for same-sex marriage, sharing the lack of homogeneity and consistency in the arguments put forth by the proponents who say that there are no differences between the sexual proclivities of same-sex and heterosexual married couples.²⁸

Giampietro writes that “marriage is a *public* good.”²⁹ Having based this thesis on Genesis 1 and 2, he concludes that God’s design for sexual fidelity within lifelong marriage is something from which everyone benefits: men, women, and children. This is for the public good. And so, he takes on the question: “Who can marry?” This is very different from the question of whether consenting adults should be discouraged from engaging in certain sexual acts. His emphasis is on the one-flesh union as ordained and instituted by God.

He makes his case by pointing out the following justification for equal sexual rights within the gay-marriage community. A relationship between two homosexual persons is analogous to a relationship between two people of opposite sex who are unable to conceive a child—this assumes that both same-sex and opposite-sex couples

can engage in sexual intercourse because the result in any sexual embrace is a “pleasurable experience.” Giampietro responds, “This is an unwarranted assumption that the argument for same-sex marriage entails that reproductive activity and reproductive-type activity are not essential to marriage.”³⁰

Thus, practicing homosexuals focus on fostering “intimate friendships.” According to same-sex marriage proponents, any form of sexual activity unites two gay persons. Giampietro says this is categorically false because there is no public good fostering marriage in this line of logic. Building on this support of same-sex marriage by its proponents, they say that marital acts need not be essentially reproductive since most sex acts of opposite-sex couples are not reproductive. Giampietro counters with, “Same-sex marriage advocates that I have studied do not even attempt to describe sexual acts as intrinsically unitive but rely on the *assumption* that homosexual acts [all sex acts with the exception of sexual intercourse] can indeed be unitive.”³¹

Some same-sex marriage advocates say that marital homosexual activities mean “more” than sexual intercourse. From this, Giampietro draws the following conclusion; advocates of same-sex marriage “must show how this “more” is *marital*. If [they] cannot show how, then two persons of the same sex who engage in sexual acts can be no more married to each other than can two persons of the same sex who do not engage in sexual acts with each other.”³² Based on this and other similar statements, the author concludes, and rightly so, that proponents of same-sex marriage necessarily eliminate the principle of biological complementarity from the definition of [same-sex] marriage. Hence, a sexual act is defined as from within each individual, which is distinctly different from what is happening in the one-flesh union of a husband and wife.³³ Therefore, proponents of same-sex marriage must excise both the *unitive* and *procreative* blessings that God gave man and woman in marriage to justify their marriage under the guise that all sexual activities are unitive. People in same-sex relationships are oriented to “self,” rather than the “other.”

There is an enduring concerted effort to continue the normalization and tacit approval of divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex marriages. Normalization of divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex marriage have deconstructed words such as “marriage,” “family,” and “procreation” to *nomina*, words that are defined only as applied to one’s personal situation. As Jean-Marc Berthoud states, “They have no reference to anything permanent in reality. No such thing as the essence of ‘marriage’ or of ‘family’ exists.”³⁴ Divorce and cohabitation have made biblical marriage and family arbitrary in meaning and reality. Marriage is essentially meaningless to family and vice versa.

Therefore, the next two sections (the divine order of creation and Jesus on marriage) take us back to the basics of marriage so that “where you begin is where you will go” in teaching and proclaiming the gospel so that marriage and family are centered in the Trinitarian God and his church. Christian marriage and family is hardly arbitrary, either as lived or understood theologically.

Divine Order of Creation: God’s First Wedding and Family

In the beginning, God created Adam on the sixth day, and from Adam’s rib God created Eve. They are a one-flesh union. They are the first husband, *ish* (אִישׁ) and

wife, *ishsha* (אִשָּׁה).³⁵ Luther states, “the wife is given by God alone.”³⁶ This is God’s first divine institution that God blessed and said, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gn 1:28, ESV).

Herein, God blessed the first couple that he married, not only with faithfulness toward him and each other, but also for the procreation of children.³⁷ And so, Adam and Eve comprised the first family, the first church on earth, and the first individual members of the body of Christ.

Martin Luther writes in the Large Catechism, “For the following reasons he [God] also wishes us to honor, maintain, and cherish it [marriage] as a divine and blessed walk of life. He has established it before all others as the first of all institutions, and he created man and woman differently (as is evident) not for indecency but to be true to each other . . . Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God’s serious concern”³⁸

Marriage and Christ, His Bride the Church

Paul’s analogy of marriage to Christ and his bride the church forms the model for the divine and blessed walk of married life (Eph 5:21–27). As man and woman were created and brought together into one-flesh union, so Christ and his church are united into one flesh and spirit by his word, and received by grace through faith alone. As God brought Adam and Eve into being in a worship relationship with him by his word, so the Lord God has called his priesthood of all believers into his family by his word declared in Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar. As the first man and woman, Adam and Eve formed the first divine institution of marriage. So Christ and his bride the church, formed the first one holy [una sancta] Christian church on earth.

Therefore, the husband and the wife are to live their marital walk of life by faith alone as the pattern that Paul sets forth in Christ and His bride, the church. Marital life is about the “other.” As Christ loves the church and gave up his life so that we (the church) might have abundant life, so also husbands are to love their wives. And wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. What the Lord Jesus Christ does for his church, so the husband does for his wife. This pattern of marriage, as Christ and his bride the church must be discussed in marriage counseling within the context of Genesis 1–3.

The scriptures and confessions speak of three main areas of marital life: faithfulness to each other and to God, procreation, and as the remedy to “outburst of sin.”

Faithfulness

A married couple gives to each other trust and faithfulness. A husband sees his wife as more significant than himself, and the wife sees the husband as more significant than herself. The wedding vows that a couple takes before each other and God, testify to this faithfulness and trust: “I take you to be my wedded spouse, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy will; and I

pledge to you my *faithfulness*.”³⁹ Luther writes on marital faithfulness, “. . . marriage is a covenant of fidelity. The whole basis and essence of marriage is that each gives himself or herself to the other, and they promise to remain faithful to each other and not give themselves to any other.”⁴⁰

Procreation

“God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gn 1:28). Adam and Eve were the first family; created to be fruitful, and to desire each other in a proper way “for the natural desire of one sex for the other sex is an ordinance of God in nature.”⁴¹

Hence, children are a blessing whether God brings children to parents through their sexual embrace or through adoption. Children are given to parents with the direction given in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Ephesians 6:4. Parents are to raise their children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord Jesus Christ, from birth throughout earthly life until the parents enter their eternal rest. Parenting and catechesis is a lifetime venture of responsibility. I believe that parents need to be reaffirmed that their instruction, even to the child in the womb, occurs as they worship the Lord Jesus in spirit and truth every Sunday. Baptism is the culmination of that “in the womb” worship experience.

“The work of procreation is something good and holy that God has created; for it comes from God, who bestows His blessings on it.”⁴² However, procreation in today’s culture has been removed from husband and wife to fertility clinics where there are many ways to “make” a baby. Hence, babies may be thought of as products or commodities. Whether a couple is infertile or fertile, they may seek a child with specific characteristics or gender. Procreation therefore becomes a self-fulfilling desire rather than the will of God.

An embryonic child not placed in the womb via Assisted Reproductive Technology is discarded or frozen in liquid nitrogen. Procreation is deconstructed to technological reproduction using donor spermatozoa and oocytes (eggs), surrogate wombs, and soon, artificial wombs. This is contrary to the word of God that children are to be procreated within the love of the husband and wife, and not from the outside. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession states: “This love of one sex for the other is truly a divine ordinance.”⁴³ Luther adds, “We marvel at procreation as the greatest work of God.”⁴⁴

Remedy to Outbursts of Sin

Marriage according to the Scriptures and confessions is about faithfulness between the husband and wife and for procreation, but also as a restraint from outbursts of sin. The Apology refers to this restraint as a “remedy.”⁴⁵ Luther believed that marriage is the remedy to sexual sin outside of and prior to marriage.⁴⁶ Luther adds, “Marriage is necessary not only for the sake of procreation but also as a remedy. These things are so clear and well established that they can in no way be refuted . . . Paul, accordingly, speaks of marriage as a remedy and on account of these flames commands to marry.”⁴⁷ Meilaender contributes the following regarding marriage that restrains sins:

We should not ignore, however, what is obvious in human history: that the disordered sexual appetites of sinful human beings are often wayward, that they bring fragility, vulnerability, and chaos into the most intimate of human relationships. We should not apologize for suggesting that when the institution of marriage directs and channels those anarchic impulses toward faithful service of one other person in his or her bodily need, when God restrains sin in that way, human well-being is served. God begins to teach us the meaning of faithful love by offering marriage as a place of healing.⁴⁸

We must remember that there will always be tension faced by married couples in their divine walk of life in Christ. Satan is always tempting a spouse to look away from their wedding vows saying, “Did God really say?” God’s Spirit reminds spouses that they are blessed by God to continue living the life of Christ Jesus, always looking to the other in humility as more significant. A couple married by God in Christ is a community that resides within the larger community, the body of Christ. Their conduct reflects their commitment to each other and to the Lord their creator, the one who brought them together in his name. A couple’s Christ-centered marriage is counter-cultural. The divine walk of life of a married couple is not a human work, but the hand of God’s grace.

Jesus and Marriage

With the ongoing normalization of cohabitation and same-sex marriage, supporters of these unnatural lifestyles say that since Jesus didn’t directly address them, especially “men having sexual intercourse with men” and “women having sexual intercourse with women,” then all must be okay with Jesus. However, Jesus did address the sexual immorality of cohabitation in John 4 with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s Well. “Jesus said to her, ‘Go, call your husband, and come here.’ The woman answered him, ‘I have no husband.’ Jesus said to her, ‘You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true’” (Jn 4:16–18).

Herein, Jesus was leading her to see the sin and guilt of adulterous cohabitation. This is a reflection of Jesus’s solemn concern for the proper marital life, which he instituted at the union of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The importance of the divine institution of marriage is seen in Matthew 19 when the Pharisees ask Jesus, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and bold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate” (Mt 19:3–6). Jesus goes back to the creation story to show that marriage is not only monogamous, but also that man and woman are sexual human beings. Hence, the complementarity of God’s created human creatures is manifested in their genders: male and female.

This is a radical, counter-cultural view of marriage then and now, unless you are neo-gnostic revisionists who will frequently downplay the physical aspects of marriage, urging instead that marriage is not primarily about becoming one-flesh physically, but a spiritual and emotional connection for which our physical experiences are extrinsic rather than intrinsic. In downplaying the importance of consummation in marriage, advocates of same-sex marriage have tried to reduce the meaning of marriage to merely a loving and committed relationship between two adults. It is an emotional and relational union that creates the necessary conditions for marriage, they argue, not what you do with your bodies. In fact, the physical anatomy of the adults in question is irrelevant. Marriage is first about the communion of souls in a committed and affectionate relationship and only secondarily about physical union. Hence, this reflects on the importance of the phrase that I mentioned earlier—soul mate—used in many Internet mixing and matching dating services. The body does not ultimately matter.

As God's created human creatures, we are man and woman, male and female given a body and soul. We are embodied persons given and created by God's word. As Luther writes in the Small Catechism, "I believe that God has created me together with all that exists. God has given me and still preserves my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all limbs and senses; reason and all mental faculties . . ." ⁴⁹ The body matters to God; the soul matters to God. All of this is counter to the current trends within neo-gnosticism, as the latter applies to cohabitation and same-sex relationships.

A Few Concluding Thoughts

I have presented some statistical trends relating to divorce, cohabitation among the young and old, as well as legalized same-sex marriages. These trends demonstrate that society views cohabitation as either preparatory to heterosexual and same-sex marriage or as mere companionship. In all cases, traditional one-flesh biblical marriage is under assault by those who have succeeded in spreading their normalizing message that "times have changed." Hence, heterosexual marriage is just another relationship in which each person retains individualism and self-worth, and with the realization that it can be broken as easily as relationships of cohabitating couples.

Human sexuality, cohabitation, and same-sex unions or marriages should not be a Christian's main subject while addressing marriage. God is the subject as is his divine institution of marriage. Talk about human sexuality, cohabitation, and same-sex unions should be approached in light of the Scriptures and the Confessions. This direction will lead Christians back to the basics about marriage, procreation, parenting, and the stewardship of a couple's covenant walk in Christ. This biblical basis of marriage as the walk of covenant life in Christ Jesus is Trinitarian, lives in faithfulness and service to God and each other, procreates or adopts according to his will, and serves as a remedy to outbursts of lustful sin.

When divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex unions or marriages are discussed in light of these theological and confessional foundations, Christians, see that all three are patterns of sin that must be dealt with over time in repentance and forgiveness. The word

of God is what it is; truth given and blood shed by his love and for the forgiveness sins. All this reminds me of one of Jesus's last commands to his disciples before his ascension that tends to be lost within the argument over the deconstruction of marriage: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Marriage is a divine institution given to God's holy people by his word. Luther writes, "Married life is no matter for jest or idle curiosity, but it is a glorious institution and an object of God's serious concern . . . Therefore, I have always taught that we should not despise or disdain this walk of life as the blind world and our false clergy do, but view it in the light of God's word, by which it is adorned and sanctified . . . It is not a restricted walk of life, but the most universal and noblest, pervading all Christendom and even extending throughout all the world."⁵⁰

As the hymn writer wrote:

Make their love a living picture
Showing how You loved Your Bride;
When You gave Yourself to cleanse her,
When for her You bled and died.
Jesus, You have made her holy.
Pure and fair her radiant train;
To Yourself, Your Church presenting,
Without wrinkle, spot, or stain.⁵¹

Marriage is a divine institution and a blessed walk of life in Christ Jesus!

Endnotes

¹ Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 414.

² *Luther's Works*, Volume 1, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, trans. George V. Schick American Edition (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 134.

³ LW 51:358.

⁴ Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 414–415.

⁵ Ibid., 414.

⁶ The Annual Report on Family Trends, 2011, 129.

⁷ P. Fagan and N. Zill, *The Third annual Index of Family Belonging & Rejection* (Marriage & Religion Research Institute, 2013), 1. Statistics derived from the 2008–10 American Community Survey of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁸ National Health Statistics Reports, No. 64, April 4, 2013, 1.

⁹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Key Statistics from the National Survey of Family Growth, http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg/key_statistics/a.htm#marriage.

¹⁰ K. Hymowitz, J. S. Carroll, W. B. Wilcox, and K. Kaye, "Knot Yet: the Benefits and Costs of Delayed Marriage in America," (The National Marriage Project, 2013): 10.

¹¹ Ibid., 3–8.

¹² G. T. Stanton, *The Ring Makes All the Difference: the Hidden Consequences of Cohabitation and the Strong Benefits of Marriage* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2011).

¹³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁴ Ibid., 16–17.

- ¹⁵ A. J. Cherlin, *The Marriage-Go-Round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 139.
- ¹⁶ My interest in this stems from several conversations with my brother, Roger A. Weise, MD, Board Certified in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics, Director of Older Adult Health Care, Alexian Brothers Hospital, Elk Grove, IL.
- ¹⁷ Susan L. Brown, J. R. Bulanda, and G. R. Lee, "Transitions Into and Out of Cohabitation in Later Life," *J. Marriage and Family*, 74 (August 2012): 776. Their data is based on a sample of 28,539 older adults.
- ¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau. (2010a). Table UC3: Opposite sex unmarried couples by presence of biological children/1 under 18, and age, earnings, education, and race and Hispanic origin/2 of both partners, 2010. Current Population Survey, 2010 Annual Social and Economic Supplement. <http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/hh-fam/cps2010/tabUC3-all.xls>.
- ¹⁹ Brown, et al. 784, 790.
- ²⁰ L. A. Jacobsen, M. Mather, M. Lee, and M. Kent, "America's Aging Population," *Population Bulletin*, no. 10 (February 2011) 66:3.
- ²¹ Brown, et al., 791.
- ²² LW 1:240 As far as I am aware, this is the only direct reference that Martin Luther makes condemning cohabitation on the basis of the doctrine of marriage as a divine blessing and walk of life.
- ²³ ME, VT, NH, MA, NY, CT, RI, MD, DE, MN, IA, WA, CA and the District of Columbia
- ²⁴ Data is taken from the Pew Research Center, June 26, 2013. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/06/26/how-many-same-sex-marriages-in-the-u-s-at-least-71165-probably-more/>
- ²⁵ <http://www.gaychristianonline.org/samesexmarriageceremony.html>
- ²⁶ www.gayweddingvalues.com/Secularmarriagepronouncements.html. Other variations for wedding vows exist on this website.
- ²⁷ *Lutheran Service Book Agenda, The Commission on Worship of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 65.
- ²⁸ A. E. Giampietro, "Marriage and the Public Good," *Christian Bioethics* 13 (2007):211–224.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 212.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 218.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 218–219.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 219.
- ³⁴ Jean-Marc Berthoud, "The Family in Theological Perspective," *The Religion & Society Report*, vol.22, no. 2 (March 2005):11.
- ³⁵ Personal communication with Dr. David Adams, dept. of exegetical theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO., on the use of *ish* and *ishah*: "The words for man (אִישׁ) and woman (אִשָּׁה) are regularly used in the sense of 'husband' and 'wife.' Of course, this is context dependent."
- ³⁶ LW 44: 8.
- ³⁷ *Book of Concord*, 63.
- ³⁸ *Book of Concord*, 414.
- ³⁹ *Lutheran Service Book Agenda* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 68–69.
- ⁴⁰ LW 44:10–1.
- ⁴¹ *Book of Concord*, 249
- ⁴² *Luther's Works*, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5, 237.
- ⁴³ *Book of Concord*, 249.
- ⁴⁴ *Luther's Works*, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5, 118.
- ⁴⁵ *Book of Concord*, 250.
- ⁴⁶ *Luther's Works*, Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5, 116, 118.
- ⁴⁷ *Book of Concord*, 249–250.
- ⁴⁸ G. Meilaender, "The Venture of Marriage," *The Two Cities of God: The Church's Responsibility for the Earthly City*, eds. C. E. Braaten and R. W. Jenson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 122.
- ⁴⁹ *Book of Concord*, 354.
- ⁵⁰ *Book of Concord*, 414.
- ⁵¹ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 860, verse 4.